

Point of Origin

The community is where awareness begins

Fall 2004

Marquette County Community Earns National Recognition for Wildfire Preparedness



Wisconsin fire officials present homeowner association with national Firewise recognition plaque. Pictured left to right are: Gary Bibow, WDNR Forest Ranger; Carey Koats, Neshkoro Fire Chief; Bill Deter, Crystal Lake Club Firewise Board President; and Jolene Ackerman, WDNR Firewise Liaison.

Because of its efforts to reduce the vulnerability of homes and landscapes to wildfire, a Marquette County lake association has earned Firewise Communities/USA recognition. The Crystal Lake Club worked with WDNR forestry staff and the Neshkoro Fire Department to conduct a wildfire hazard assessment and develop a plan to address safety concerns. Residents then worked together to implement the plan. An official plaque and recognition materials were presented to residents of the club Memorial Day weekend.

Crystal Lake Club is the first community in Wisconsin to be recognized as a Firewise Community, joining many other communities nationwide that have been recognized since the program's inception in 2002. To receive recognition, the community completed the following activities:

- Working with Fire Chief Carey Koats and the Neshkoro Fire Department, properties, driveways, and roads were inspected to determine if they were accessible to fire fighting equipment. Trees that would block or impede access were marked for removal.

- DNR staff (John Hintz, Jon Vote, and Jolene Ackerman) conducted a wildfire hazard assessment. They looked at issues related to the flammability of structures and the surrounding vegetation and the ability of firefighters to reach structures. The assessment was written up and presented to Crystal Lakes' Firewise Board.

- Based on findings in the assessment and recommendations from the Neshkoro Fire Department, Crystal Lakes' Firewise Board created a plan that described solutions that would be implemented by the community.

- During the winter months, trees were removed to improve access along roads and driveways. Removal of the trees also helped reduce the amount of fuel that would carry a fire to lakefront homes.

- In May, Crystal Lake held a spring clean-up day, which included having several tons of tree stems and branches broken down with the help of a wood chipper. DNR staff and members of the Neshkoro Fire Department were on hand to help out. Accustomed to burning yard waste, this method of breaking down woody debris was a fire prevention measure in itself, as debris burning is the number one cause of wildfires in Wisconsin.

Achieving Firewise recognition is not a quick or easy process. Crystal Lake Club has done an outstanding job of creating a local Firewise Board and implementing Firewise principles. By preparing homes, outbuildings, and landscapes before a wildfire occurs, Crystal Lake Club has dramatically increased the chance that homes will be protected when a wildfire occurs.



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From the Editors...

Our purpose is to provide you with information about the services, products, and direction of the Wisconsin DNR and the various partners in protection, referring specifically to wildfire prevention, suppression, and outreach. Building partnerships is the key to success!



Save of the Year



One might look at this photo and think this threatened structure doesn't pose a risk to the wildland firefighter, right? (look on the back page for more!)



We in the Wisconsin DNR- Bureau of Forest Protection would like to extend an invitation to our fellow cooperators by soliciting information or topic ideas from our readers. If you have any ideas for the newsletter, contact:

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2004 Forest Fire Grants Update

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources administers two grant programs that award monies to Wisconsin Fire Departments and County Fire Associations to improve fire protection in their communities. This year, the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) grant awarded sixteen (16) Wisconsin County Fire Associations a total of \$113,000. The Forest Fire Protection (FFP) grant will award 255 Wisconsin Fire Departments a total of \$800,000.

Both grant programs are 50/50 cost share; the local organization matches the state or federal share. The VFA grant relies on federal dollars to support County Fire Associations. The FFP grant relies on a mixture of state and federal dollars to improve local Fire Departments' capabilities in controlling and managing wildland fires.

The VFA grant had applications with \$477,000 worth of project proposals from 20 county fire associations. Four (4) associations were not able to be funded. The maximum VFA grant award is \$10,000 for any one association. These grants support county wide fire protection projects. This year, county communications upgrade projects were a commonly funded use of VFA grant moneys. Consult the DNR web page at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cfa/LR/vfa/grants.html> for the latest grant program details.

The FFP grant had applications with \$2.2 million dollars worth of project proposals from 293 Fire Department applications. 255

Fire Departments were funded, 15 Fire Departments were not funded and 23 applications were ineligible. The maximum FFP grant award is \$10,000 for any one Fire Department. All of these grant awards assist local Fire Departments in improving wild-land protective clothing, forest fire suppression equipment and communications. Consult the DNR web page at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/cfa/LR/ffp/grants.html> for the latest grant program details.

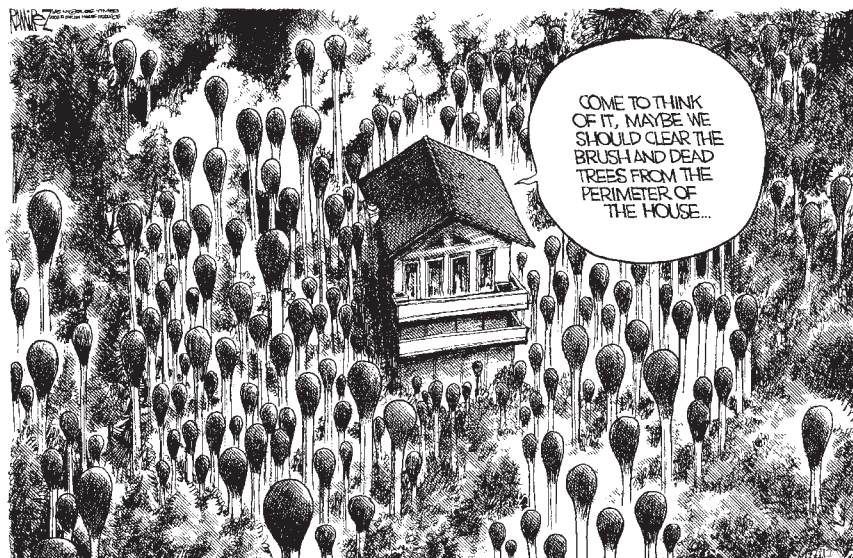
Next year, it is anticipated that the funding levels will be maintained near the current levels. 🔥

For more information, contact Chris Klahn,
Cooperative Fire Specialist, at 608-297-2214.

Marquette County National Recognition Continued

Firewise Communities/USA is a nationwide initiative that recognizes communities for taking action to protect people and properties from the risk of fire in the wildland-urban interface. This program is of special interest to small communities and neighborhood associations that are willing to lower their wildfire risk by implementing programs tailored to their needs. The communities create the programs themselves with cooperative assistance from state forestry agencies and local fire departments. 🔥

For more information contact Jolene Ackerman,
WDNR Firewise liaison, at 608-267-7677.



The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources provides equal opportunity in its employment, programs, services, and functions under an Affirmative Action Plan. If you have any questions, please write to Equal Opportunity Office, Department of Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

This publication is available in alternative format (large print, Braille, audiotope, etc.) upon request. Please call 608/267-7494 for more information.

Special thanks to Michael Ramirez and Copley News Service for permission to reprint this cartoon!

Wildland Fire-Prone Property Inspections



An extreme example of a poorly placed firewood pile! Flammable materials such as firewood need to be placed at least 30 feet from all structures. Photo by Darren Vik

Central and northwestern Washburn County has been the site of several large fires over the years, most recently the Five Mile Fire in 1977 and the Oak Lake Fire in 1980. These two fires consumed 83 structures and 159 structures respectively. According to a National Park Service publication, the number of housing units has doubled in the St. Croix basin during the period of 1980 to the present. At the same time there has been no significant increase in structural fire departments or structural fire fighters to protect these structures from wildfire. Simulated "Mock Forest Fire" drills have consistently shown that about half of all structures threatened in a wildfire will not receive protection from the limited structural fire units available.

The Spooner Fire District, working with the Wisconsin DNR, recently completed the first phase of a Firewise initiative that brings private landowners into the partnership with structural and wildland firefighters. The goal of the project is to minimize the number of structures lost in a wildfire by educating landowners on the techniques they can employ, in advance, to reduce the likelihood of their structure igniting during a wildfire event. Darren Vik, Spooner Fire District Chief, led the project with the help of Bob Focht, WDNR Forest Ranger, and Pam Dembinski, WDNR, who created a database of maps, photos, and specific site data.

Fire-prone property in the high hazard pine fuel complex in the north Spooner Fire Response Unit was the target for inspections during the 2003 growing season. Inspections concentrated on the objectives of making landowners aware of opportunities to increase firefighter safety and structure survivability. A site evaluation report was prepared for each property, focusing on the characteristics of access, structures, and vegetation. The landowner was given a copy of the report along with Firewise publications and general fire prevention information. Using a Global

Positioning System (GPS) receiver, each residence and driveway intersection with the town road were documented. These locations were downloading using Arc View and located on an aerial photo. In addition, locations where sprinkler systems could be best utilized during a wildland fire were documented. Digital photos of each structure were also taken and combined with the air photo location and inspection record.

A total of 98 inspections were completed in 2003. Approximately half of the inspections included a personal contact. Neighbors discussed the results of their inspections amongst themselves. Some whose property had not yet been inspected were anticipating Darren's arrival. Every one of the personal contacts were positive, no negative feedback was received! This project was funded with a grant awarded by the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, USDA Forest Service. Due to the success of the effort, the Spooner Fire District received additional funding to continue the project into 2005. 🔥

For more information, contact Darren Vik (715-635-9115) or Bob Focht (715-635-4086).

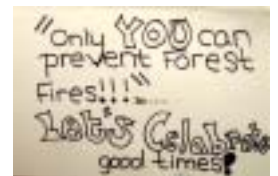


Smokey Bear 60th Birthday Card Contest Winners!

Congratulations to Maggie, age 11 from Plum Lake Library and the Northern Waters Library System on her entry for the 'Smokey Bear's 60th Birthday Card Contest!' Maggie, among hundreds of other children in the state, had the opportunity to design a birthday card to celebrate Smokey Bear's 60th birthday in a summer library reading program at her local public library.



Front



Inside

The contest began back in June and was a partnership program sponsored by the Department of Public Instruction and the Wisconsin DNR. Kids Pre-K through those who had completed 5th grade designed a birthday card for Smokey and his timeless fire prevention message "Only You Can Prevent Wildfires!" Seventeen local library systems winners were chosen locally and moved on for a chance to compete statewide. On August 9, 2004, Smokey Bear turned 60 years old. Smokey would like to personally thank everyone who entered the card contest and for continuing to keep Wisconsin safe from wildfire! 🔥

The Three "E's" in Fire Prevention



Wildfire prevention is traditionally defined as 'those fire management activities concerned with the attempt to reduce damage from fire through education, engineering, and enforcement.' Traditionally, these have been the fundamental steps to prevent fire and reduce risk and hazards. The Waupaca Area Fire District recently participated in Phase One of a Wildland Fire Prevention Patrol project focused on each of the strategies of a human-caused fire prevention program. The project is a cooperative effort with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry.

The main goal of the patrols was reduce the number of human caused fires by educating the public on outdoor burning regulations. To accomplish

this, the patrol was activated on high - extreme fire days in April and May. The patrol consisted of two wildland trained firefighters patrolling in the fire department's type 7 wildland engine. Magnetic fire danger signs were attached to the engine to inform the public of the daily fire danger level. The patrol targeted areas within the fire district that were high hazard/high wildland fire occurrence.

The patrol handed out numerous pieces of fire prevention material dealing with outdoor burning laws, FireWise landscaping, and smoke alarm information. The patrol was also the first suppression unit on the scene of two wildland fires and was able to give the incoming units a fire size-up.

Wildland-urban interface areas were patrolled to give the firefighters a view of any new construction that was going on, poor fire truck access, and the fuel types in these areas. The patrol also helped new firefighters by familiarizing them with road location throughout the district.

Phase Two of the project will continue in the spring of 2005. For more information contact Tim Banaszak, Forestry Technician at 715/258-8432 or timothy.banaszak@dnr.state.wi.us 🔥

This project was funded with a grant awarded by the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, USDA Forest Service.

New Fire Department Wildland Fire Training for Cooperative Areas

The WI DNR now has instructors available to teach wildland fire training to fire departments in cooperative fire protection areas of the state. These instructors will be teaching wildland fire topics as requested by fire departments or the 8 hour WI DNR course, "Introduction to Wildland Fire Suppression for Wisconsin Fire Departments."

This training effort will assist fire departments to safely suppress the 3,500 wildland fires that occur every year in the cooperative areas of Wisconsin. The Division of Forestry is funding this initiative. If your fire department is interested in this free wildland fire training, please contact Chris Klahn, Cooperative Fire Specialist at (608) 297-2214 to get on the training schedule.

Fire Prevention Kit Order Form

For a limited time only, you can order a one-of-a-kind fire prevention kit! The kit includes coveted items such as various DNR publications, Smokey Bear guidelines, grant information, a video and guide on fire prone property, a snazzy poster or two and a few other trinkets and must-haves! Availability is in short supply- only **300 kits** are being sent out. So, fill out this order form and mail it in ASAP to the address below. You can't afford not to!

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Only **You** Can Prevent Wildfires

"It's Just a Grass Fire"

A Spotlight on Poynette Fire Response Unit



Dunning Road Fire, 5 miles outside of Portage: 58 acres, 21 structures threatened, all saved. Photo by Ralph Sheffer

As the temperature begins to rise and the humidity drops, people in the fire services start to get anxious. They know it's not a matter of "if," it is a matter of "when and where." Will the fire be burning through uninhabited woods or will it be threatening homes? Will it be burning in tinder dry pine plantations or will it be "just a grass fire?" Questions like these run through the minds of fire fighters around the world. With more and more people moving away from the city to enjoy the country life, the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) grows and grows, causing tougher decisions to be made.

When many fire fighters think of a large fire threatening a number of homes in the WUI, the picture that quickly comes to mind here in the Midwest is that of a fire racing through the crowns of pine forests with scattered houses tucked back in among the trees. This fire is a very real threat. However, one type of fire that all too often doesn't get the same type of consideration is a fire running through grass fields, potentially towards the same number of houses, but closer together.

In southern Wisconsin, more and more small communities are popping up as people try to find a place to get away from hectic city life. These may be permanent residences of people who commute to the city to work, or they may be weekend getaways. Whatever the case may be, these small, unincorporated villages and subdivisions are becoming more and more common place. As an example, just outside the city of Portage is an area that encompasses approximately 3000 acres of marsh, of which the State of Wisconsin owns 2200 acres known as the Swan Lake Wildlife Area. Active railroad tracks run through this property as well as a

major highway to the west. Perched on the very edge of this wildlife area is Saddle Ridge Estates. More specifically, it is almost 200 homes sitting on about 200 acres just off the northeast corner of the wildlife area. Wolfgram subdivision lies on the opposite side of the marsh approximately 1 mile south of Saddle Ridge, and is made up of 250-300 homes on about 350 acres. More and more homes are being built here every day. Both of these subdivisions have a large number of homes that average \$150,000 to \$200,000 each, and are sitting within 100 feet of the edge of miles and miles of cattails and reed canary grass.

With the increase in homes, comes the increase in the human factor, and many of these people have had very limited experience with fire, either wildland fires or conducting controlled burns. All it takes is one individual at the wrong time to make things become a major problem for fire fighters. In the spring of 2000, a fire started about 6 miles outside of the city of Portage, Wisconsin. The fire was controlled in 2 hours with a total of 20 structures threatened in the first 10 minutes of the fire, with the next closest fire department resources 15 minutes away. In 2003, two fires burning at the same time and six miles apart scorched almost 800 acres marshland with houses on all sides. In 2004, a 15-acre cattail marsh, surrounded by 31 homes (not including outbuildings) and an elementary school, went up in flames in downtown Portage. Something to keep in mind is that fires burning through the grass can spread at almost 3 times the rate of a running crown fire under the same weather conditions and can threaten more homes in a shorter period of time.

In looking at the common denominators of fatal and near miss fires, it is important to remember that these occur in light fuels such as grass and are innocent in appearance before unexpected shifts in wind direction and/or speed result in "flare-ups" or "extreme fire behavior." Add homes to the mix and fire fighters have to make even tougher decisions and potentially put themselves in more dangerous positions, making the life of a Wisconsin fire fighter all the more challenging. When fire fighters see the flames roaring through the tops of the pine trees, they know to stay clear. When they see a fire moving through the grass, there is much more potential for becoming complacent in thinking "it's just a grass fire." Sadly, time and time again it's proven that there is no such thing as "just a grass fire" when something goes wrong. 🔥

The Point of Origin

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Leave No Stone Unturned!



*What looked like an
innocent structure,
turned out to be a
flammable risk!*



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Smokey's Birthday Present

To mark Smokey Bear's 60th birthday the Dells Ranger Station received a Smokey Bear Statue funded through a grant from the Hazard Mitigation Program. A life-sized statue of Smokey Bear was placed in front of the Dells Station on Aug 7, 2004, along with a donated bench and decorative landscaping. The dedication ceremony was attended by DNR staff, retired DNR staff, EFW's, local leaders, members of the community and the fire departments of the Dells FRU. Awards were presented to all those who assisted with this project, and a Smokey's 60th birthday cake and refreshments were enjoyed by all those who attended.

The project was funded through a federal hazard mitigation grant that was awarded from the United States Forest Service, North-eastern Area State and Private Forestry Division. The purpose of the grant was to increase awareness in communities and individual residences in the wildland-urban interface.

This statue was a unique way to partner with the city of Wisconsin Dells and



Left to right: Mark Johnson, Mike Warnke, Smokey Bear, and Melissa Gillaume

reinvigorate the ranger station back into the community. Since the statue has been installed there have been many local citizens and tourists stopping by to view the new statue and get their picture taken with Smokey. Smokey's statue has most certainly increased discussion of wildfire danger in the community.🔥

*By: Melissa Gillaume, Forestry
Technician at Wisconsin Dells*

